

## The Stomach Begins

digestion, but the most important work is done by the bowels, liver and kidneys. Failure of these to act efficiently allows the whole body to be poisoned.

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## The Romance of A Marriage.

CHAPTER XIV.

In May's eyes the world holds no one so handsome, so noble, so lovable, as the great, simple-minded young gentleman whose whole thoughts are on his farm, and whom Alice looks down upon as a boor, and Mr. Stacy regards with superior condescension. They go along in silence for some minutes, and then May says, gently:

"I'm afraid you are sorry that we came, Mr. Estcourt."

"Eh?" says Bob, looking down at the still face in the moonlight, its large, blue eyes turned up to him with meek regard. "Sorry? What do you mean?"

"If we hadn't come you would have smoked the old, black pipe, wouldn't you?" she says.

Bob laughs.

"Perhaps," he says; "but don't mind that."

"I wish you would," she says; almost as if she were asking a favour. "I am sure you would be happier; besides—"

"Besides what?" says Bob in his blunt fashion.

"It doesn't seem natural to see you without that black pipe."

Bob laughs and he nods at the forms in front.

"I should risk a row," he says. "Alice is very strong about my pipe. She says that I'm not fit society for any respectable young lady, and hints rather plainly that I shall die a bachelor unless I relinquish my old and trusty friend. Awful hard fate that, isn't it?"

"I don't know," murmurs May. "Perhaps she wouldn't mind, after all."

"She—who?" says Bob, who is not quick at following a meaning.

"Your—the young lady. Why, didn't you say that no one would marry you?" says May, laughing but colouring a little.

"Oh," says Bob, "there are other things beside the pipe, and he shakes his head solemnly. "There is no fear that shall ever be put to the test. Poor men don't marry now, you know; and I'm awfully poor. I hope we get a good harvest this year."

"Oh, so do I!" says May, devoutly. He stares a little at the emphasis.

"Why, what will it matter to you?"

he says, innocently, not to say stupidly. "Mr. Palmer doesn't farm anything to speak of, and it wouldn't matter if all went wrong to you, you know. You're not a farmer's daughter—lucky for you."

"I wish I was," says May, very softly, almost to herself.

This is such an astounding aspiration that Master Bob stops short.

"Oh! come, I say, you know!" he says, looking down at her open-eyed, and with an amused smile. "You wouldn't like it, you know. To be short of money—as all farmers are now by George—and to have no carriage, and footmen, and—and all that sort of thing—vaguely."

"But I should," says May, earnestly. "I don't care for carriages, and I detest footmen. I hate money!"

"It's lucky your father isn't here to hear that sentiment," says Bob, simply; "he would have a fit."

May laughs softly.

"If you had seen as much of it as I have, and all the trouble it brings, and the nuisance of it," says May, "you'd say the same."

Bob looks down at the pretty face, very sweet and gentle in the moonlight, and yet touched with a bright eagerness, and his eyes droop.

"Oh, well!" he says, "you'll get used to it, you know. It's no use wishing you were poor. You see you weren't meant for a farmer's wife—I mean hurriedly, and with a suppressed sigh. "You were cut out to be a great heiress, and—and will marry some swell, perhaps, with a handle to his name—great heiresses generally do, you know; and then you'll look back at this wish of yours and laugh."

May is silent for a moment; then she says, very softly:

"You haven't lit your pipe yet."

"No," he says, simply. "I forgot it. You really don't mind? It's awfully good-natured of you. I wonder all girls aren't like you!"

"Paula?" suggests May.

"Oh, Paula!" he says. "Paula is a brick! I don't know what I should do without her. It's a pity all girls aren't like you. What a jolly place the world would be!"

May laughs.

"I'm nobody and nothing," she says. "Sometimes I feel as if I were all alone in that great old place, hating all this fuss and show. I don't think the world is any the better for me."

"Don't you?" retorts Bob, emphatically. "Why—" he stops rather abruptly, and looks up at the moon.

"It's a fine night," he says, rather curiously. "I think we shall have a

good harvest after all. Hallo! Where's the moon gone?"

"How dark it is!" she says, and she laughs and she stumbles over a stone in the farm-yard path.

"Take my arm," says Bob, and he takes her hand and draws it within his.

It is such a tiny, little hand that his great, strong palm swallows it up, and it seems to nestle so warmly and confidently that he cannot release it for a moment, but make quite an unnecessary business of placing it on his arm. Doubtless he thinks that she does not notice it; but if he could see the rose-red flush that flies to her face as her hand lies in his, Master Bob would be undecided—or perhaps he wouldn't.

"Keep close to me," he says. "There's a puddle on your side, and, of course, you haven't got thick boots on."

Thus advised, May draws a little closer, and his strong arm presses the tiny hand that lies on it so confidently closer to him.

In the semi-darkness he ventures to look down at her with a strange, yearning wistfulness in his honest, boyish eyes, but averts his gaze as they come into the light shown by the window.

"Here we are," he says. "Oh! Stacy's going in. Come on," and he leads her to the door; but here Alice turns with an exclamation of disgust.

"That horrid pipe!" she says. "I thought I smelt it coming along. If you must smoke, Bob, and it seems that existence is impossible to you without doing so, why don't you smoke cigars or cigarettes, like Mr. Stacy?" and she throws a sweet, approving glance at that gentleman.

"There! I told you so!" says Bob to May, who has slipped her hand from his arm. "I told you there would be a row. I'd better go round the stable," he says, "until it blows over. You go in and rest."

"Yes," says May; "but I'm not tired. I'm sorry I asked you to smoke now," and she laughs.

He looks at her, then over his shoulder at the three now entering the parlour.

"Really not?" he says. "You wouldn't like to see the colt, I suppose? There's some puppies, too," temptingly.

"But I should," she replies, "if I may—"

"Oh, better not ask," says the abandoned Bob. "Go first and tell them afterwards, that's the way. I learnt that at school, and it answers just as well at home. Come on. Give me your hand," he adds, like a great school-boy.

May's face lights up, and she puts her hand into his.

"Wait a minute, the lantern's here," and he lights it. "Now, then, before Alice has time to shout after us. But you are sure you'd like to go?" hesitating a moment.

"I'm quite sure," says May, with a bright smile.

Bob, still holding her hand—which is scarcely necessary now that they have got the lantern—leads her to the stable and unlocks the door, and, setting down the lantern, strips the cloth off the colt.

"Don't be afraid of him," he says, "he's used to Paula. Here, I've got a piece of sugar in my pocket—oh, no! it's this confounded dress-coat; I forgot. Never mind, here's some corn, hold it in the palm of your hand. Give it to me."

May holds out her hand, palm upwards, and Bob is so struck by the smallness, softness, and pinkness of the tiny palm, that he stands staring at it, with the corn grasped in his own.

"You're not afraid he'll bite me, are you?" says May, laughing. "I'm not."

"Eh! Oh, no," Bob says, with a little start, "he won't bite you." And he drops the corn into the outstretched palm. "Get down, pup! Get down!"

May goes up to the colt and holds her hand out, and he turns his great, soft, brown eyes to her for a moment questioning, and then, as she puts her arm around his neck, he whinnies, evidently with approbation, and thrusts his velvety nose into her hand.

"What a lovely beauty he is," breathes May, afraid to speak aloud lest he should take fright. "And how soft and warm his nose is!" And she lays her head against his satin neck caressingly.

Bob leans against the stall, and looks on with a great, hungry wistfulness in his heart. For at the first time in his life he wishes that he were a colt.

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"Give me some more," she says, turning her eyes without raising her head. "How he likes it. If I were to feed him often he would learn to know me, wouldn't he?"

"Yes," says Bob, filling her hand again. "Don't you feed your ponies at the Court sometimes?"

"No, never," she says, with a sigh. "Stacy says it is un ladylike to go into the stables; besides, there are so many grooms always hanging about, and they all stand and touch their hats, and wait as if something were going to happen. It is nothing but form, and fuss, and ceremony even in the stables," and she smiles rather sadly. "I'd rather have this dear little thing for my own than all our horses."

A sudden light comes into Bob's face.

"Would you really like him?" he says. "By George! I never thought of that. You shall have him!"

May colours and shrinks back, and Bob, misunderstanding, colours and shakes his head.

"No, of course not. I beg your pardon. Mr. Palmer might not like it. I didn't think of that."

May looks up eagerly, but no words come. Something tells her it is true. Bob, a little embarrassed by his blunder, turns his attention to the puppies, who have been keeping up an incessant leaping and yelping during the colloquy.

"Get down!" he says. "Get down!" "Oh, don't be angry with them," pleads May, and she stoops and picks up one of the fat, sleek mites.

"They'll spoil your pretty dress," says Bob, remonstratively.

"That doesn't matter," she says. "Do you really think it is pretty?" meekly.

Bob nods, his eyes travelling from the dress to the face.

"Awfully," he says. "But then, you see, I should think any dress you wore pretty. I mean—" he blunders, then stops short.

May hides her face over her puppy, who instantly takes advantage and bobs a kiss upon her cheek.

And poor Bob changes his mind about the colt, and wishes, instead, that he were a fox-terrier pup.

(To be continued.)

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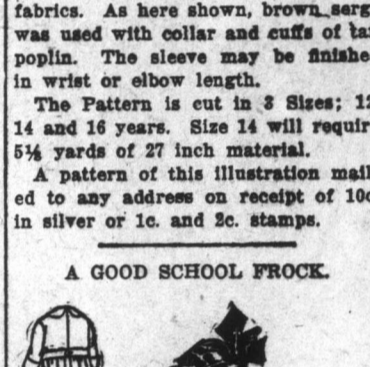


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